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Authority ED 2958  
By W NARA Date 5/18/02THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTONCol. James D. Hughes, U. S. A. F.  
Military Assistant to the PresidentMEMORANDUM FOR: Col. HaigAl —

Please read & return.  
I think we're getting  
somewhere.

Jim

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Address by  
Maj Gen Richard A. Yudkin  
to the Symposium on Tactical  
Nuclear Weapons  
Los Alamos, New Mexico  
3 September 1969

"THE CHANGING CONTEXT"

SLIDE ON

Dr. Agnew; Gentlemen:

We can perhaps take some comfort from this slide which suggested to me that earlier members of the military-industrial complex may have had their problems.

Of more practical value, perhaps, the cartoon presents the theme for my sermon here today. There is always a changing context with which we must contend, and for each generation of contenders, the past looks attractively simple, the present unpleasantly difficult, and the future -- dangerous or impossible, or even impossibly dangerous. Despite any inborn hostility, man's evolution reflects adapting to contextual change. National evolution is necessarily similarly conditioned.

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My purpose today is to identify a context within which the use of tactical nuclear weapons -- or the kinds of operations usually associated with such weapons -- might become more obviously relevant to the environment within which we find ourselves, and therefore more demonstrably rational to decision makers at national level.

To do this, I must -- as I view the problem -- start by saying that the power relationships around which we constructed our concepts of strategic and tactical nuclear operations are drastically changed from what they used to be. Thus, the established understandings of these operations demand, as a minimum, review and more likely -- if we decide the terms continue to be useful -- significant adjustment.

While I do not mean to call into question the framework which structures our symposium, I am suggesting that we need to examine very carefully what we mean by "tactical" nuclear weapons and the continuing relevance of what we have understood when we used this description. We might recall that "strategic" bombers and "tactical" fighters have effectively performed seemingly reversed roles in South East Asia. Perhaps it is not or should not be restraints on hardware, target, or geography which are given importance as criteria; perhaps constraint on objective is more properly the determinant.

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The very nature of nuclear weapons necessarily gives their employment a strategic significance; this employment may concurrently have tactical value.

Hence, while I will talk most about nuclear weapons that fit within the category we have called "tactical," I suggest that in talking about them I must necessarily give primary attention to a role and impact that are essentially strategic. Such latitude of discussion seems essential, since such weapons may find important applicability beyond the battlefield itself -- in what I would term "selective nuclear operations." By selective nuclear operations, I am referring, at this stage very generally, to operations of strategic value conducted at levels below all-out effort. In this sense, selective can refer to targeting, mode of delivery, purpose, or desired effects -- in short, taking full advantage of every option technology affords us. The important distinction here is that such operations are specifically conceived of, developed, and carried out so as to achieve strategic, but limited objectives. The concept grows from an attempt to recognize that simple solutions like total defeat and unconditional surrender may not be rational goals if the opponent has a true assured destruction capability.

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That recognition makes it a matter of utmost concern to find ways of fighting which exhibit a better trade off between the degree of influence upon the enemy and the degree of risk involved in exerting that influence.

I must emphasize that the concept of selective nuclear operations is not intended as a replacement for other nuclear options, but rather as a complement to them. Considering our nuclear capabilities in terms of strategy options -- or broad mission and employment categories -- it has been the practice in recent years to identify three main options. These are Assured Destruction, Damage Limitation and Theater Operations. I regard "selective nuclear operations" as a fourth major strategic option which sits well alongside these other three employment groupings. It will be apparent from my subsequent remarks that I do not regard these groupings as mutually exclusive. Rather they are overlapping and ought to be mutually supportive; they must include an important portion of what we have called tactical. With these basic characteristics of selective nuclear operations in mind, we can examine the case for the relevance of this strategy option to the realities of the present international environment.

In order to delineate the need for a distinct alternative which

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has developed in response to the political and military realities of the post-war world, I would like to trace the development of our strategic policy through the post-war years.

A major factor in the determination of post-war strategic postures was the growing desire to limit the Communist threat geographically. Known popularly as the "policy of containment," this concept fit nobly into the traditional American mold for defensive, non-aggressive strategy. Armed with a nuclear monopoly that was to be surprisingly short-lived, American planners revolutionized strategy by finding an effective defensive role for a weapon which seemingly was made expressly for the offensive strategist. If you will permit such a simplification, nuclear deterrence was thus born of status quo goals and moral preferences.

The "ultimate weapon" has served well in this essentially defensive role; yet, it has paradoxically produced needs for complementary strategies of a quite different nature. The conflict in Korea was but one indication that the extreme character of massive retaliation might prove incompatible with the often-undefined "line" of containment. Although the line remains relatively well-defined in Europe, its nature and location have proven less obvious in the Middle East, Southern Asia and the Caribbean. The threat of Communist aspirations has taken on the more subtle expressions of

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ideological and political expansion. The contemporary deterioration of the monolithic nature once a characteristic of the "Communist Bloc" is bound to produce future changes in our own policies. Political independence and economic development have joined forces to produce nationalistic complexities within a political world once simply and accurately described as "bipolar." Strategic advantages once enjoyed by the U.S. have been modified, if not overcome by Soviet advances, while years of effort dedicated to achieving some system of nuclear arms control continue to be frustrated by understandable preoccupations based on national security interests. These realities are complicating and will continue to complicate the effort to construct meaningful military policies and capabilities while they make it more urgent but more difficult to find ways to bring the great dangers of the nuclear era under some form of workable control.

The 1960's saw one obvious effort aimed at overcoming the strategic shortcomings of over-dependence on massive retaliation. The doctrine of "flexible response" has attempted to provide a non-nuclear answer to major aggression. In practice, however, it has yielded some other, perhaps unforeseen results. "Flexible response" has come to mean almost exclusively "conventional response." Merely by having the obvious intent and capabilities to meet all less-than-ultimate threats in a conventional manner, we

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have isolated our nuclear capability at the top of the conflict spectrum, and it has lost much of its applicability to anything less than total effort. Simply categorizing some of it as "tactical" does not seem meaningful. In other words, flexibility has been equated or limited to conventional action to an extent that ultimately inhibits flexibility.

This seemingly counterproductive outcome has been accompanied -- even accelerated -- by developments in the military force relationships between the U.S. and the Soviet Union; here the most salient fact is the changed strategic nuclear balance. Both the U.S. and the USSR now possess secure second strike or Assured Destruction capabilities. The Soviet leaders no doubt are fully aware of this condition which they have sought so hard to achieve. They are likely to have drawn a fundamental inference from the changed strategic relationship: that the United States might thus be deterred from escalating to high intensity nuclear war in response to a Soviet non-nuclear attack or limited nuclear attack.

We ought also to ask how the Soviets might view the impact of the changed strategic balance on our allies -- especially in the critical European theater. The member nations of NATO -- ourselves included -- have been unwilling to maintain sufficient non-nuclear forces to insure the defeat of an all-out conventional attack by the Warsaw Pact. Hence the threat of deliberate nuclear escalation plays a key role in NATO strategy. We

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have been at some pains over the years to make sure that the Russians were aware that should a conventional defense prove inadequate, NATO could reasonably choose to turn to nuclear weapons.

But what made a NATO nuclear response reasonable was that it was backed by the strategic nuclear forces of the United States. In the face of that U.S. deterrent, the Soviet Union was unlikely to respond to a NATO nuclear initiative in a way that would result in the nuclear devastation of Western Europe. A large scale Soviet nuclear attack on Europe, according to U.S. declaratory policy, could bring full U.S. nuclear retaliation directly against the Soviet homeland. But in today's context, a full retaliatory assault would pose a high risk of the consequent destruction of the United States. In other words, in a decision that never really could be made in advance, in a decision seriously conditioned by the moment, the U.S. may think twice about making a full SIOP response to even a serious Soviet move in Europe. The Europeans sense this in the air; so do the Russians. This leaves the NATO nuclear option--as it is structured today--with a less certain foundation and hence with inevitably reduced credibility in Soviet eyes.

The Soviet assessment of the situation, in sum, could be that not only is there reduced probability of massive U.S. retaliation to less-than-all-out aggression, but that there is also a lessened likelihood of a deliberate nuclear escalation on the part of NATO. The Soviet conclusion then might be

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that while there remain obvious and extremely great risks to any military aggression against NATO or other areas -- those risks are substantially less than they have been in the past.

I want to be very clear that I am not suggesting that the changed strategic relationship and the presumably changed Soviet assessment of risks mean that Soviet leaders are now more likely to initiate aggression or have a greater incentive to do so. We are all aware that there are a number of influences which affect Soviet behavior, and taken all together it would appear that the USSR has little to gain and a great deal to lose from rocking the boat to this extreme. However, deterrence is a structure that should be designed to hold up not only on a fair summer day but in rough weather as well. No one can forecast with certainty what the future may hold in the way of incentives for Soviet action or in the way of Russian perceptions of threats against which the USSR might wish to intervene. We have recently been reminded of that basic uncertainty by the events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the Brezhnev doctrine, the assertion of a right to intervene in West Germany.

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If we shift our attention to other areas--to the Far East for example--we can find that there too the changed strategic balance implies important shifts in the deterrence equation. It seems clear that over the next few years some modification of our forward defense strategy in the Asian Pacific area is inevitable. With the likely adjustment of forward deployed US combat elements and some shifting of defense responsibility in forward areas to national or regional security forces, the deterrent and backup role of US forces will take on new significance. Although our strategic forces can continue to deter direct attacks on the US, in Asia as in Europe the nature of this deterrent becomes uncertain as Soviet and Chinese Communist nuclear forces improve and increase. It is probably apparent to the USSR, to Communist China, to Japan, Australia, other allies and to neutral states, as well, that we would enter into an all-out nuclear war only as a last resort when the most vital American interests were threatened. Therefore, against the backdrop of our more massive strategic response options, forces designed for application to theater problems of deterrence or war fighting must have a range of non-nuclear and nuclear capabilities to include a capacity for selective nuclear operations.

Moreover, in the future, U.S. national authority may wish to have the option to decouple theater threats from intercontinental threats--and this may apply of course to Europe as well as other theaters. This would seem to require forces capable of significant nuclear response but whose use clearly signals the intent to hold

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objectives limited Given the growing independence of regions such as Western Europe and of a state like Japan--it is conceivable that our allies themselves may desire some form of decoupling, although their reasons and ours may be anything but identical.

These evolving problems, both political and military, illustrate to some extent the pressures for change. . . the need to rethink our strategic alternatives. For while Assured Destruction remains the cornerstone of national military strategy, it is not, nor can it be, the entire structure. Because our nuclear retaliatory capability in the past has deterred a far broader range of opponent actions than we can now be sure it will, there is a tendency to persist in attributing to Assured Destruction a far wider deterrent role than it can in fact perform. If we accept that mutual Assured Destruction abilities tend to counterbalance one another in the overall deterrence equation, we must then recognize other possibilities, options, and forces which must be dealt with. In an environment approaching mutual deterrence at the ultimate level there may be more risk-taking and greater instability at a number of lower levels. But it is precisely the military component of deterrence to these less-than-all-out threats, and the means to deal with them, which has not been adequately developed. To retain control in such an environment requires concepts--and forces--that go beyond earlier views of deterrence. It will require a superiority in exploitable, politically relevant, usable military power. It will require military force that can be credibly threatened because it can be credibly committed to action. In a sense

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it requires capabilities such that the National Authority can judge that the risks of the nuclear action would be less than those of the various military and non-military alternatives.

My remarks thus far have been focused upon an examination of the needs to which our nuclear strategy must respond and upon the role within that larger framework of a proposed new nuclear option. I should now go one step further and ask the questions: "How must such an option be constructed and in what ways should the strategy be adjusted if we are to satisfy those needs?" Let me outline the criteria which I think must be met. To begin with we must recognize that "selective nuclear operations" refer to methods of nuclear employment designed to influence the enemy to terminate the conflict on favorable terms before the conflict reaches the most destructive levels. Such operations should offer some prospect that they will decrease rather than increase the risk that the conflict will expand to high intensity nuclear war. They must offer the national authority opportunity for tight control over the conflict and especially limit the possibilities for uncontrolled escalation.

A second requirement of the nuclear options which we devise is that they be able to achieve their intended effect against an opponent who will retain significant residual military power. In one sense it is just this condition which makes selective nuclear operations a feasible option -- the

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fact that the opponent possesses relatively invulnerable second-strike forces eliminates the case for preemption by him.

For such options to appear reasonable to the National Command Authority, they must promise more than a competition in resolve by way of a war of nuclear attrition or than a simple matching of attacks without strategic purpose.

The effectiveness of selective nuclear operations as an element of U.S. deterrence depends ultimately on Soviet belief in our capability to maintain a relative advantage in an escalatory war of attrition. Should any exchange of limited nuclear attacks occur, the effectiveness of U.S. forces in achieving their missions and the failure of Soviet forces to do so would be the most convincing deterrent to any further such attacks by the USSR. Foreknowledge on the part of Soviet leaders of the qualitative superiority of U.S. forces in selective nuclear operations would be likely to deter the USSR from initiating a limited attack competition.

Finally, these operations must imply or embody a reasonable and believable strategy or "theory of victory" which explains what the opponent can be expected to do and why, and also provides verifiable check points for confirming whether the strategy is working as expected.

These criteria suggest that an essential characteristic of selective nuclear options is that they couple persuasive

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military actions to political objectives. They would be paced as much by diplomatic and political events as by military considerations -- their effectiveness being related to roles of allies, international and domestic opinion and national objectives. These operations would require the coordination of military plans and action with political and diplomatic effort to achieve a set of objectives far broader than strictly military ones: These coordinated activities seek to reduce the opponent's perceived national interest in the crisis versus the risks and possible losses; at the same time they increase his awareness of the depth of US interest and commitment to employ effective force; they seek to gain domestic and international support for U.S. action and develop such pressures against the opponent; they seek to insure for the United States and deny to the opponent critical military support from other nations; they emphasize to the opponent his vulnerability to our operations and that continuing hostilities will be increasingly to his disadvantage; and they communicate to the opponent what we desire him to do while signalling both the intent to limit actions and the readiness to terminate on reasonable terms.

To achieve these objectives implies, on the military side, the discriminate and controlled application of force to communicate demands and intentions clearly and to achieve precisely specified effects -- effects reflecting and supporting the

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objectives of the national authority. This means the development of a range of forces and weapons useable for controlled, selective and discriminating nuclear attacks to demonstrate both resolve and the ability to coerce without pressuring the adversary to launch massive attacks. Compared especially with forces for the Assured Destruction mission, the functional orientation of forces for selective nuclear operations would require significant design differences. Mobility, penetration effectiveness, delivery precision, yield and limitation on collateral damage are examples of areas in which sharp differences would be discerned.

These considerations suggest that the success of such operations in terms of achievement of their essentially political objectives would be in large part dependent on the availability of what we might call focused-effect nuclear weapons. They require delivery systems providing extreme precision and reliability in target identification as well as delivery accuracy. Closely associated is the need for near-certain target kill probabilities with minimal required sorties.

Some of the aspects of developing a selective nuclear option have been examined in a study effort bearing the name NU-OPTS and conducted within Air Force headquarters with extensive assistance from our major field commands and the RAND corporation. The first part of the study, completed early in 1968, was concerned with the impact of limited nuclear operations on

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the residual capacity for performing the Assured Destruction mission. In the second phase of the study just recently completed, the objective was to determine whether it was indeed feasible within certain rather stringent limits on collateral damage and political and military sensitivity of targets attacked to achieve precisely specified objectives with limited numbers of attackers. The study systematically examined an arbitrary selection of representative targets, attacked with a range of up to seventy-five weapons with the focus on technical or purely military feasibility of target destruction. The finding was that such operations are feasible -- in other words, that we could attack point "X" in the Soviet Union for instance without causing collateral damage or involving US losses beyond the bounds set for the problem. Another part of the most recent NU-OPTS study examined the political problems and requirements and I will comment on those a bit later. So far we have only made a start on the problem but we have established to our satisfaction two crucial points which make it possible to go on -- that with forces now on hand or planned for the next three years, selective nuclear operations would be operationally feasible and that within levels foreseen they could be conducted without jeopardizing the U.S. Assured Destruction capability. We need a greater effort to determine what the most suitable sets of targets would be for such operations and if necessary to design weapons tailored to such targets.

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We may also conclude that the delivery systems and the nature of the operations and the weapons would have to be uniquely and rather obviously discriminable by the enemy from those used for Assured Destruction or all-out counterforce attacks.

Guidance systems, command and control, highly accurate and reliable intelligence, flexible and timely planning, and decision-making, and penetration against undamaged defenses are some of the other areas which obviously present great problems.

Finally, I want to underscore this point: The selective nuclear operations I have discussed would not be intended as a substitute for existing battlefield nuclear capability. Instead, selective nuclear operations provide a necessary back-up to lower level escalatory options -- and to their effectiveness as deterrents. They could provide a possible alternative to battlefield engagement.

My remarks so far today have been directed toward considerations which might make some types of nuclear employment relevant in the military context of a particular crisis. But we all recognize that the ultimate test of the relevancy of a nuclear option lies in its acceptability to the President. Such acceptability in turn depends upon more than the criterion of military relevance. The President must be sensitive and

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responsive as well to political, moral, economic, and other considerations and pressures which may be associated with any nuclear employment decision. It seems clear that among such pressures the impact of attitudes and opinion -- and questions of domestic and foreign support -- will have an important influence on Presidential decision-making.

It seems equally evident that the relationship between opinion and political decision-making is extremely complex, and its precise nature is unpredictable and is likely to vary according to the nature of the crisis situation. But if military men have a responsibility to present the President relevant and therefore reasonable alternatives, it seems necessary to have some feeling for the nature of the problem he confronts.

Consider, for example, both the complexity and importance of problems involving the attitudes of allies toward our use of nuclear weapons in different contingencies. Let me raise just a few questions that point to some of the most obvious issues in this regard. In the context of combined defense, as in NATO for example, is consensual agreement among allies regarding the necessity of nuclear employment an absolute requirement for our considering such employment? What would be the political effects of employment without consensual, or even unanimous agreement? Would such effects

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be more harmful than the threat we are seeking to neutralize? What are the effects upon allies of unilateral employment? Do we care about such effects, and in this context, do we really care about allies? These are the kind of provocative issues which must be faced up to in considering nuclear alternatives.

The President, as an elected officer, is likely to be especially attuned to U.S. domestic opinion. Particularly if success in a prospective conflict will call for great sacrifice or long endurance by the nation, the President is likely to give very careful attention to public attitudes -- to avoid actions which conflict strongly with public expectations and to attempt in all his moves -- including military ones -- to build public support.

How might we view the impact of U.S. public opinion -- in a situation involving nuclear issues? The impact of opinion is likely to be greatest in a slowly building crisis -- and probably of least immediate influence when a conflict arises abruptly and is swiftly terminated.

In this respect we must recognize the crucial role of adequate defenses in any limited nuclear war -- or in any nuclear crisis. The presence or absence of such defenses could well be the key variable both in mobilizing public support and in sustaining the resolve of the decision-maker.

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What attitudes characterize U.S. public opinion toward nuclear issues? The first thing to be noted is that public opinion perceives -- in fact public opinion has been conditioned to perceive -- a nuclear act as a qualitative change in the level of hostilities -- a change involving the highest degree of international political significance. A closely related attitude is that any nuclear use is somehow automatically linked to an all-out thermonuclear holocaust. This second attitude is, in great part, the result of a national security policy of near-exclusive emphasis on Assured Destruction. This declared strategy has suggested to many a high probability that any nuclear use would produce consequences compared with which almost any condition would be preferable. Let me say that I find it difficult to make a serious or convincing argument against that view -- within the contextual limits of that strategy. As I mentioned earlier today, what I feel is required as an alternative is a strategy -- and supporting capabilities -- which offers something more positive and which at least offers a plausible possibility of excluding holocaust, or anything close to it, as a risk attendant on effective action. Such improvements are essential if the credibility and hence the effectiveness of deterrence is to be sustained.

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To recapitulate briefly then, US nuclear strategy since WW II, has attempted to structure a defensive and retaliatory-deterrant posture which conforms very closely to the public conception of the immediate leap from first use to holocaust. And I think it is clear that this strategy has proven successful up to now. In Europe, for example, it was presumably the awareness that local aggression carried with it the risk of initiating a chain of reactions leading eventually to wholly unacceptable damage that at least in part deterred the Soviet Union from launching such aggression. I believe it is still obviously to the advantage of the United States to preserve the notion that there is no assured discontinuity between least and greatest nuclear employment.

However, in an environment of mutual Assured Destruction -- the risk or threat of holocaust is no longer enough -- by itself -- for deterrence.

Other more relevant and more credible threats are required for deterrence, and they must be supported by usable and relevant capabilities.

Consequently, while the Assured Destruction option must be maintained at all costs, it cannot be viewed as a panacea, deterring (and usable in) all lesser intensity situations. Should circumstances propel the U.S. and USSR into a low

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intensity nuclear war, or should U.S. national interests be threatened to the extent that nuclear force is required to re-normalize the situation, National Command Authorities may prefer to exercise restraint in the use of weapons, limit target categories of attack, and discourage further escalation to higher value targets. Such controlled and deliberate operations can provide an additional option short of full-scale nuclear attack and can make more politically credible our international commitments which are not directly related to our national survival.

A question which relates in part to the subject of opinion has to do with the stability of deterrence once any nuclear weapons use had occurred. It has been suggested that pressures for or against the use of the Assured Destruction forces will intensify greatly once a nuclear conflict has begun. It is implied that however stable the structural relationships between the opposing strategic forces, this stability may somehow be overwhelmed by emotional reactions of leaders or by the demands of public opinion. I think this is unlikely to be the case although obviously no one can offer answers on this matter with any feeling of certainty. The pressures against the launching of the Assured Destruction force will not change following the use of a nuclear weapon because that opposition pressure is already at its ceiling, already fully generated.

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On the other hand, I would agree that pressures in favor of executing the Assured Destruction capability would become more vocal and more strongly heard after the outbreak of a nuclear conflict. Those pressures for use, however, will not reach the same magnitude as the pressures against -- which include not only emotions but hard calculations of self-interest. And I believe this resistance to the launching of Assured Destruction will hold up on both sides -- in the USSR as well as the U.S.

Thus at the highest levels we can anticipate that a relative stability of deterrence can be maintained--a stability which can be of an enduring nature. It is a stability which does two things: it makes a concept for selective nuclear operations feasible; and at the same time it requires such an option if we are to deal effectively with likely threats.

Within Air Force headquarters the NU-OPTS study effort has examined some aspects of the problem. While its conclusions are both partial and tentative one conclusion strikes home with great force: limited nuclear war is a possibility inherent in the logic of the nuclear environment. Our strategic posture at present appears to be deficient with regard to options appropriate to such warfare. At the same time there appears to be no convincing analytical argument which demonstrates, on political-strategic grounds, that not having such options, sustained by

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requisite preplanning, is better than having them.

I would like to conclude my comments this afternoon with a brief summary, in an attempt to refocus and correlate some of the points which we have covered.

At the outset I noted that our current strategic nuclear posture has been the result of an evolutionary process in which perceived threats, public opinion, and defense policy in general have all played central parts. The political and power realities of the earlier postwar years gave such posture real meaning, applicability, and effectiveness -- as evidenced by over twenty years of successful deterrence. However, recent changes in the world situation, in the super-power strategic balance, and in our own priorities have combined to weaken the military component of our deterrent posture. The tremendous power we can generate is compromised by its reduced credibility at lower-than-ultimate levels of conflict. The opportunities that such inflexibility might offer Soviet planners are alarming.

It seems clear that if the changing international context has narrowed the relevance of Assured Destruction to the point at which other kinds of warfighting take on increased significance, then it becomes our duty to develop the operations and hardware to cope with such changes. My comments today have been directed towards showing that precisely such a challenge

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exists today. The wide range of conflict possibilities that presently exists between the levels of battlefield nuclear exchange and full SIOP warfare suggests two things to me: first, a requirement for strategy options designed to deal with such possibilities; and second, a requirement for the forces and types of weapons to make such options a reality. This second point seems worth reemphasis in light of the orientation of this symposium: Work in the development of tactical nuclear weapons is likely to bear the greatest future significance through its contribution to the range of alternatives within the conflict limits I have just described -- that is, in terms of its contribution to a strategy option of selective nuclear operations.

I would like to close by seeking the support of a somewhat familiar authority: the British strategist, B.H. Liddell-Hart.

I would like to call upon Liddell-Hart to comment upon the dangers in failing to respond to a context of change. Analyzing the fall of France in 1940, he concluded that, "...the defeat of France started from a failure of military doctrine to keep pace with changing conditions. It was due, above all, to obsolete habits of thought and the perpetuation of the slow-motion methods of WWI." The message strikes home for me with great impact. In our era of unprecedented risk, the modern equivalent of the much precedented error of being "one war behind" becomes an unacceptable alternative.

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